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(54) **DIRECT DRIVE WINDSHIELD WIPER ASSEMBLY**

(75) Inventors: **Arman Moein**, Grand Blane, MI (US);
David Emery Peck, Rochester Hills, MI (US)

(73) Assignee: **TRICO Products Corporation**,
Rochester Hills, MI (US)

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318/443; 318/444; 310/83; 310/66; 310/68 R

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443, 444; 310/83, 89, 66, 77, 67 R, 272,
273, 68 B, 68 R

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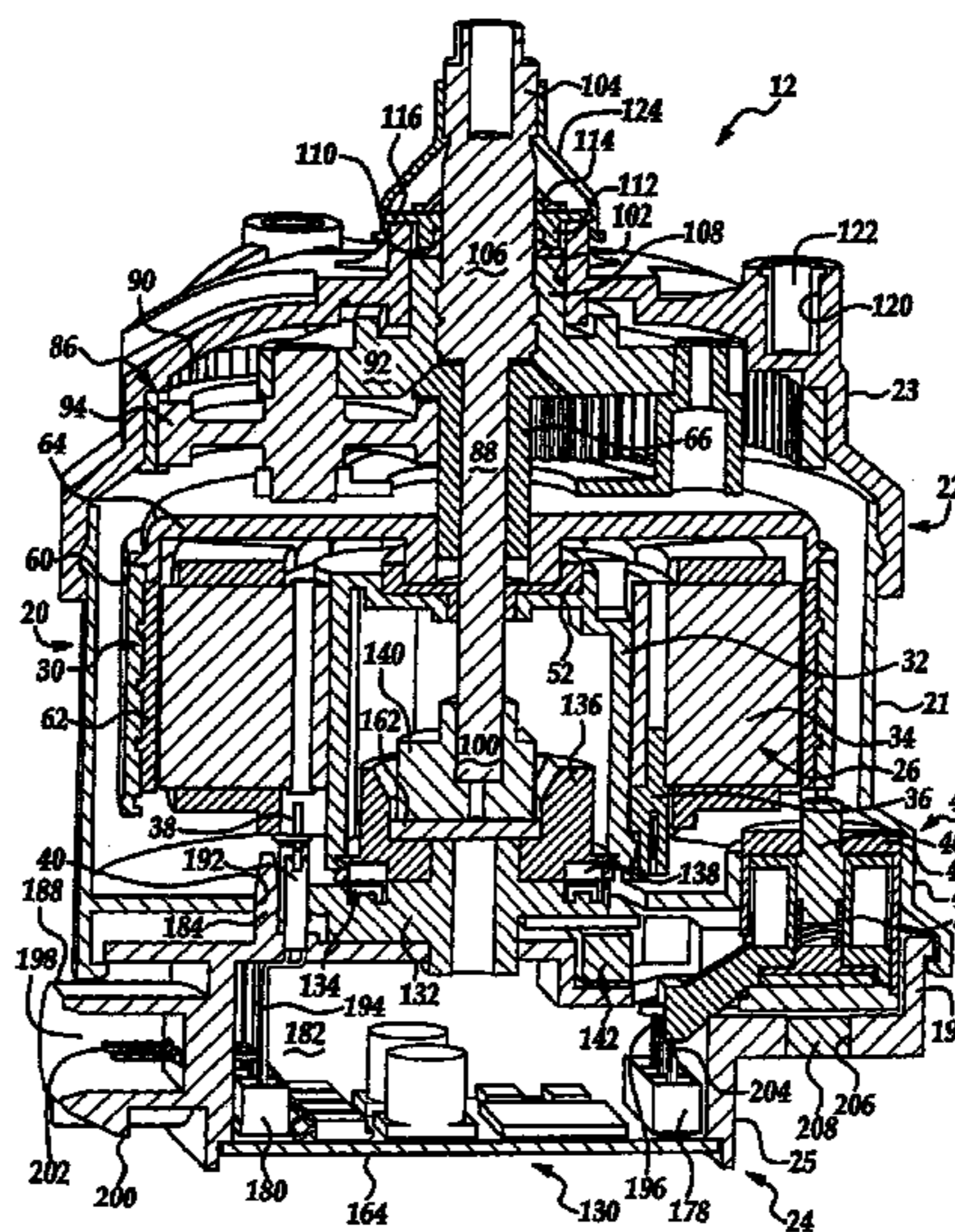
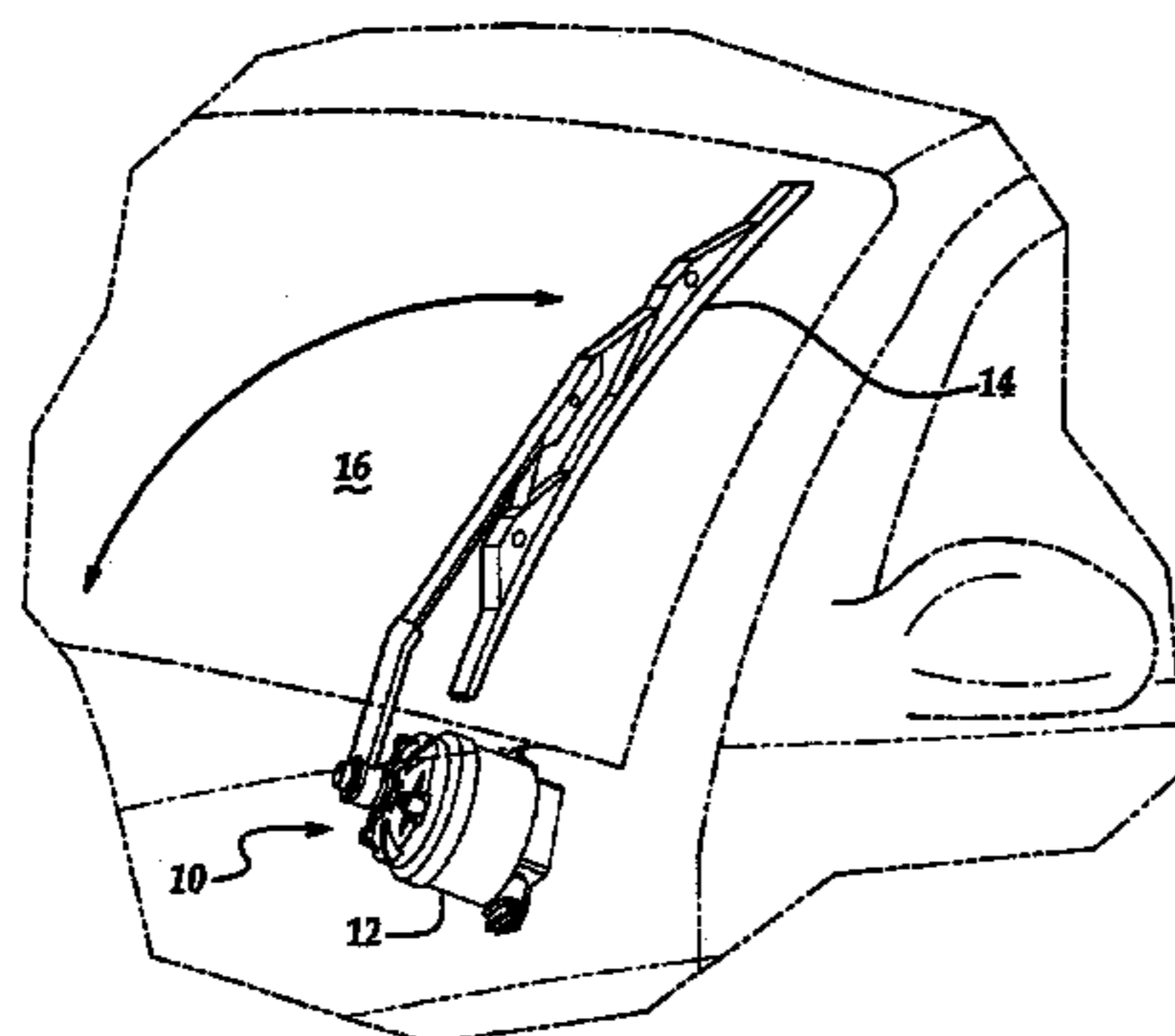
Primary Examiner—Gary K. Graham

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Bliss McGlynn, P.C.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A direct drive windshield wiper assembly including at least one brushless DC motor providing a drive torque through an output that is rotatable about the longitudinal axis of the motor and a windshield wiper that is driven by the motor about the longitudinal axis in a repeated wiping motion across the surface of a windshield. The motor including a planetary gear set having an output shaft, the gear set being coaxially disposed relative to the rotational output and the longitudinal axis of the motor and operatively interconnecting the drive torque and the windshield wiper, the gear set further operable to reduce the speed of the rotational output of the motor to the windshield wiper through the output shaft of the gear set.

20 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



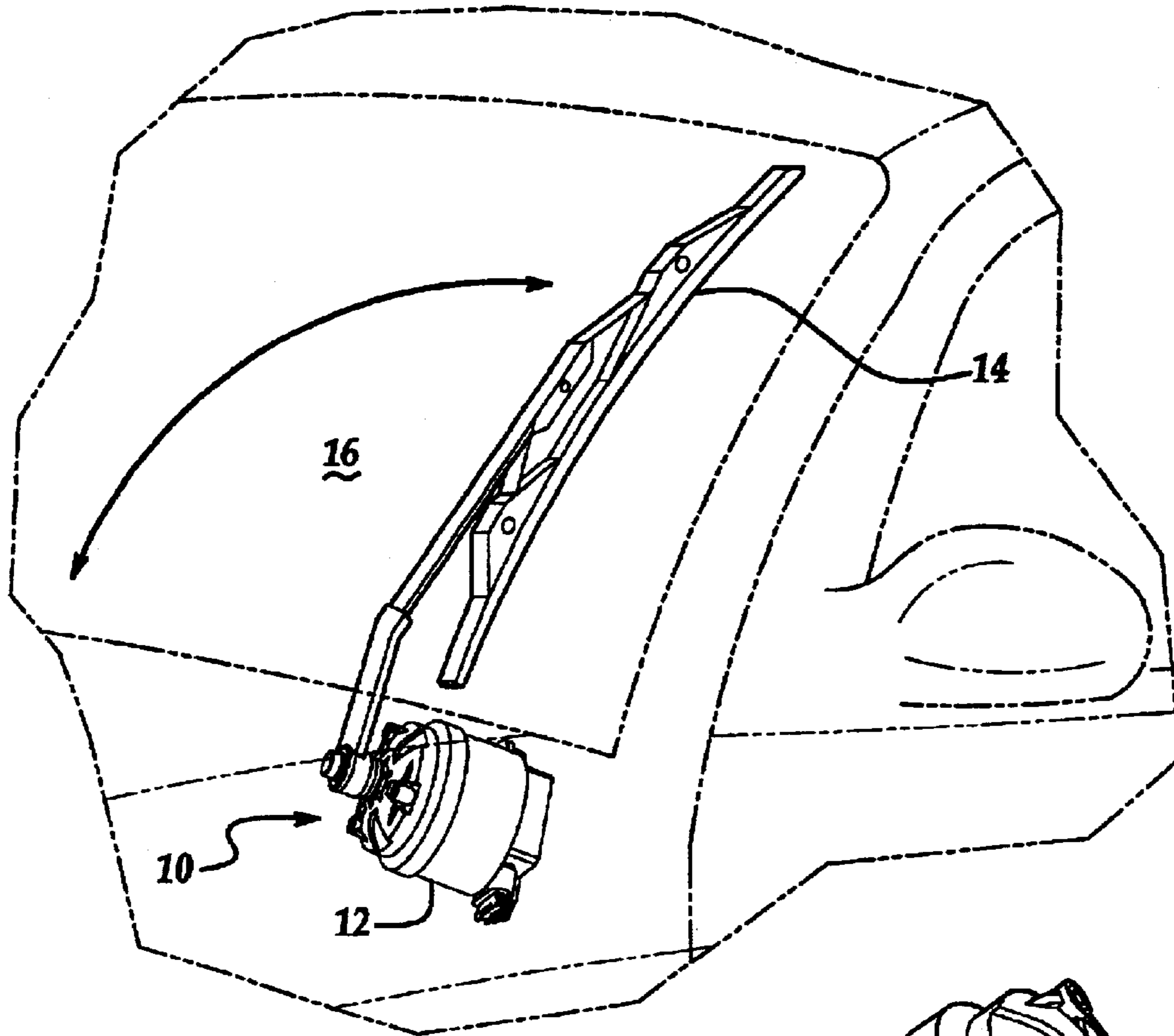


Figure 1

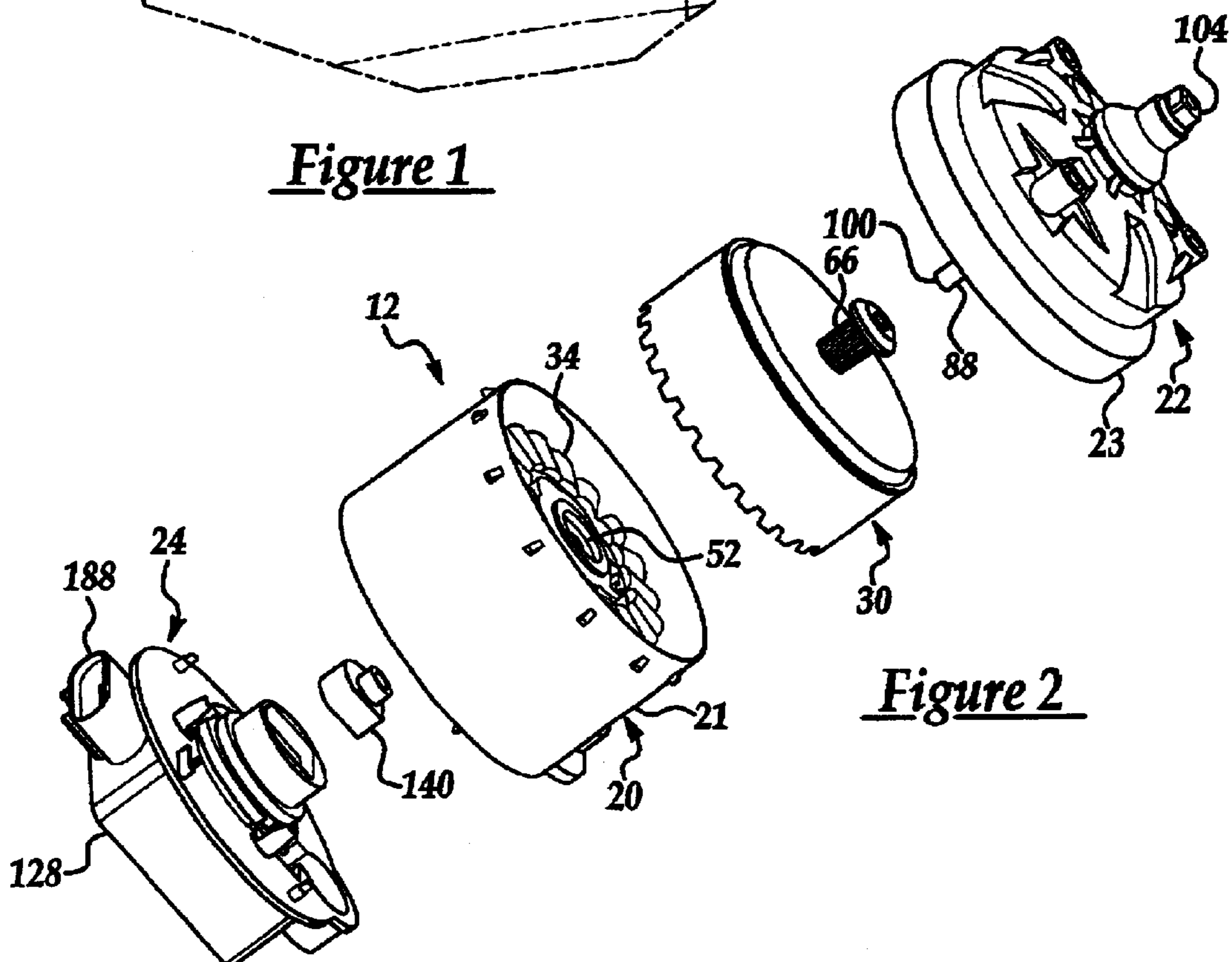


Figure 2

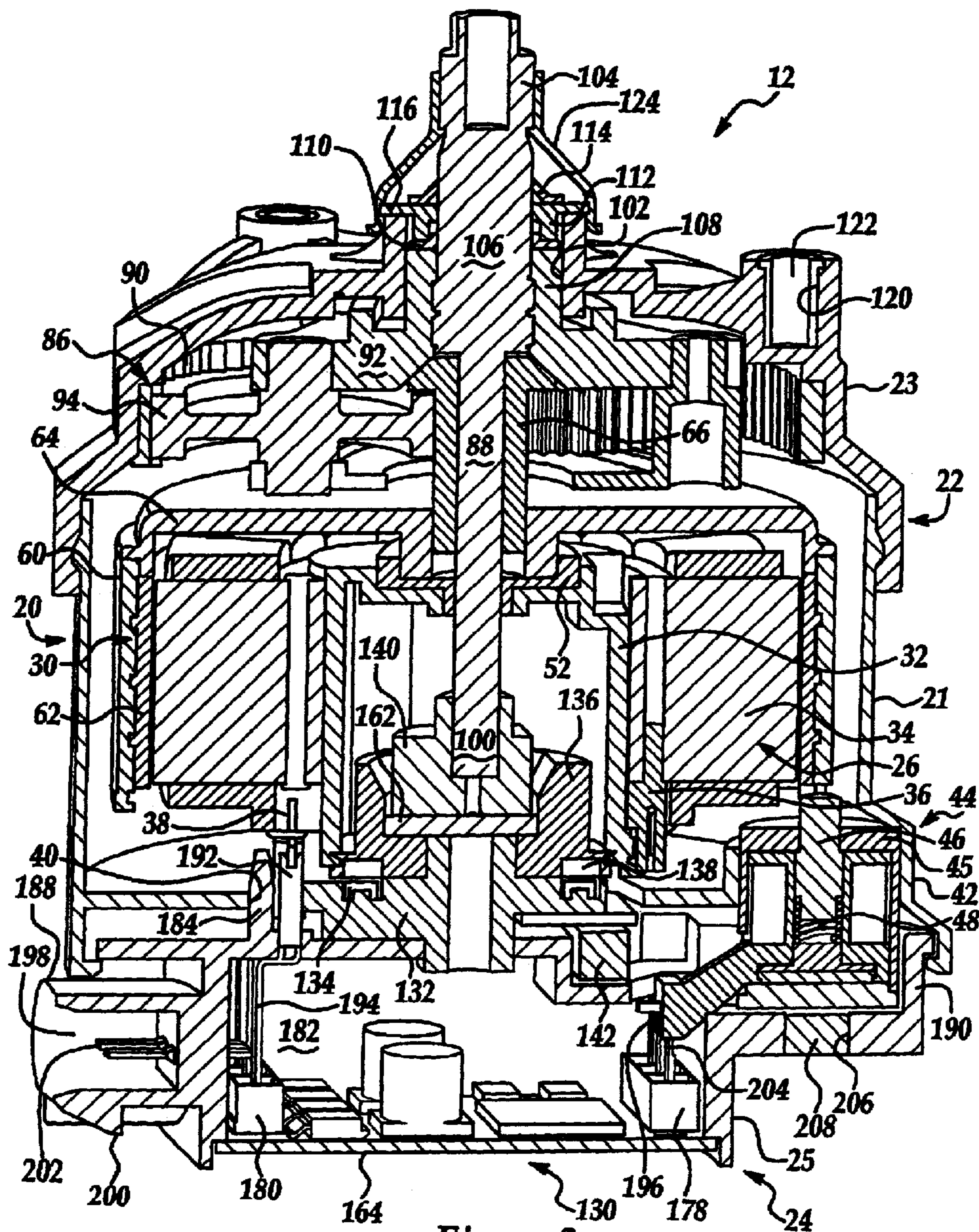


Figure 3

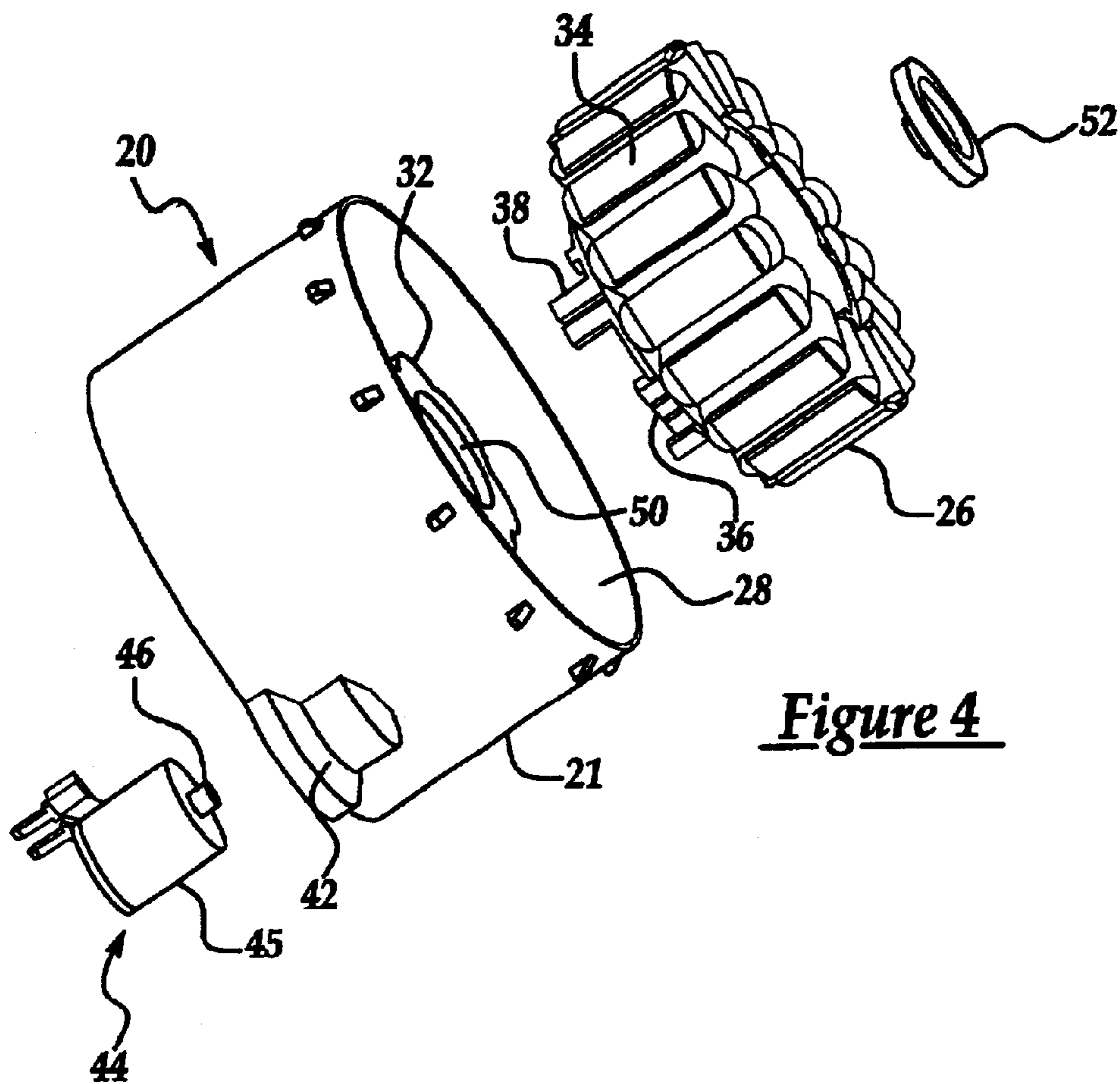


Figure 4

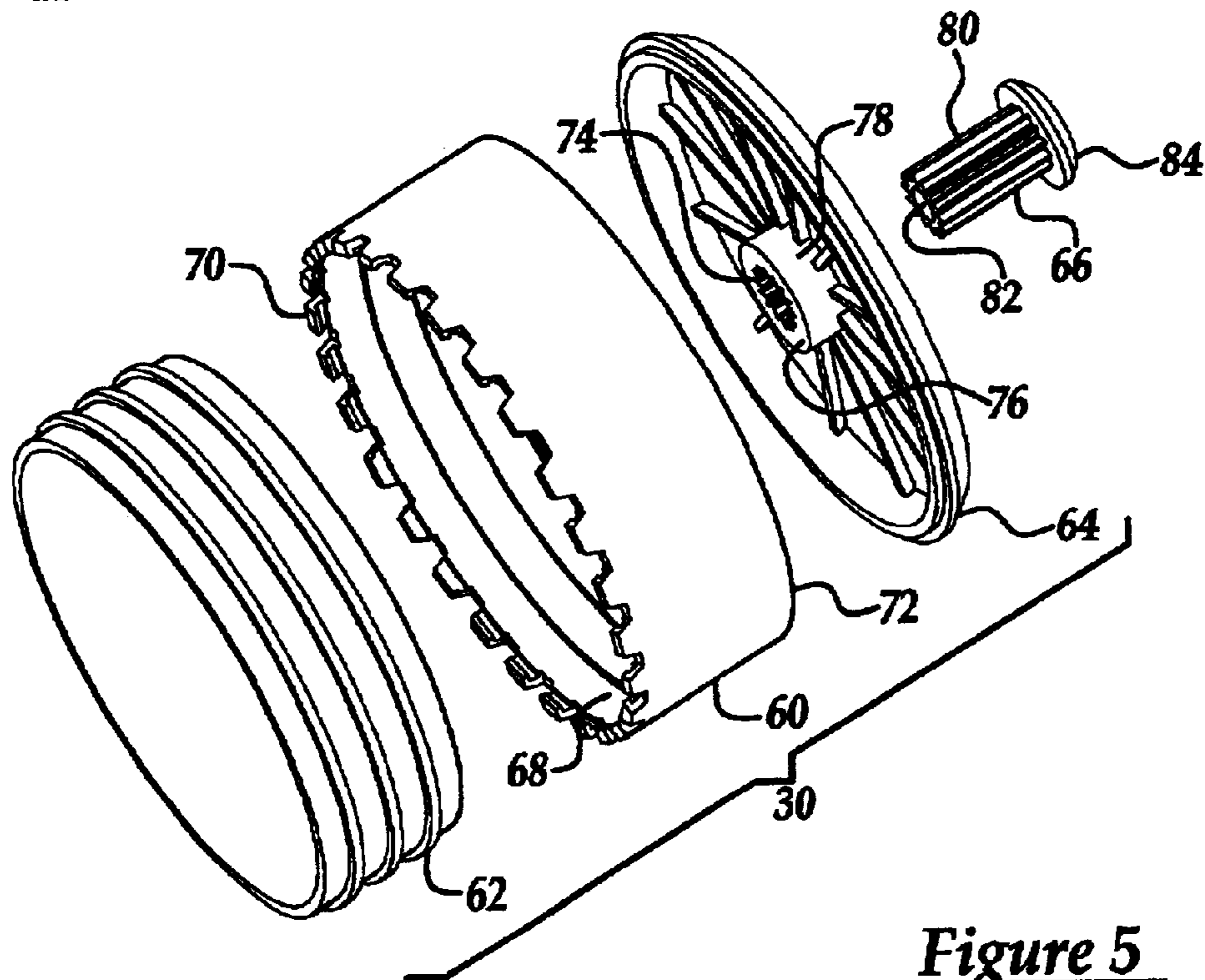


Figure 5

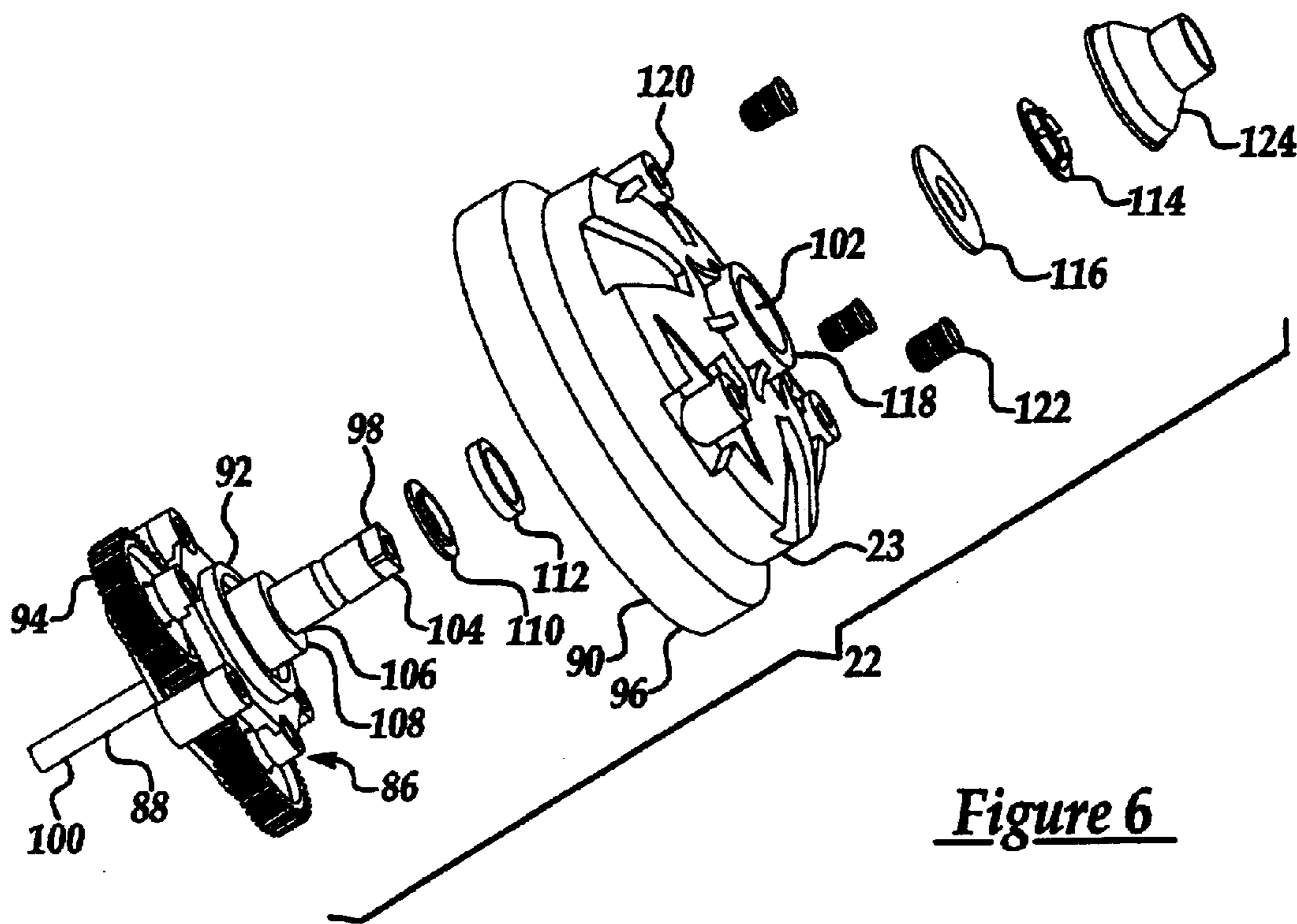


Figure 6

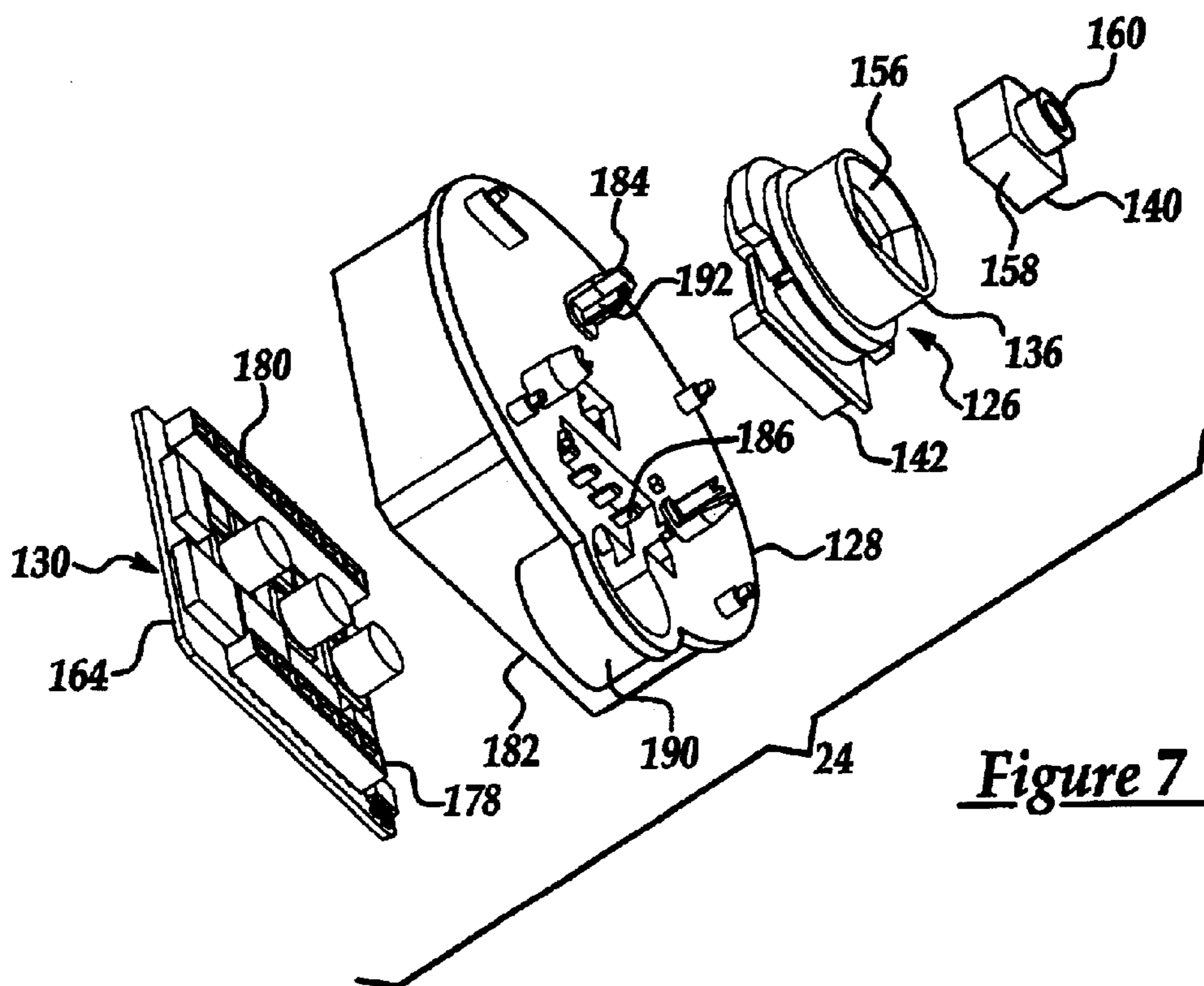


Figure 7

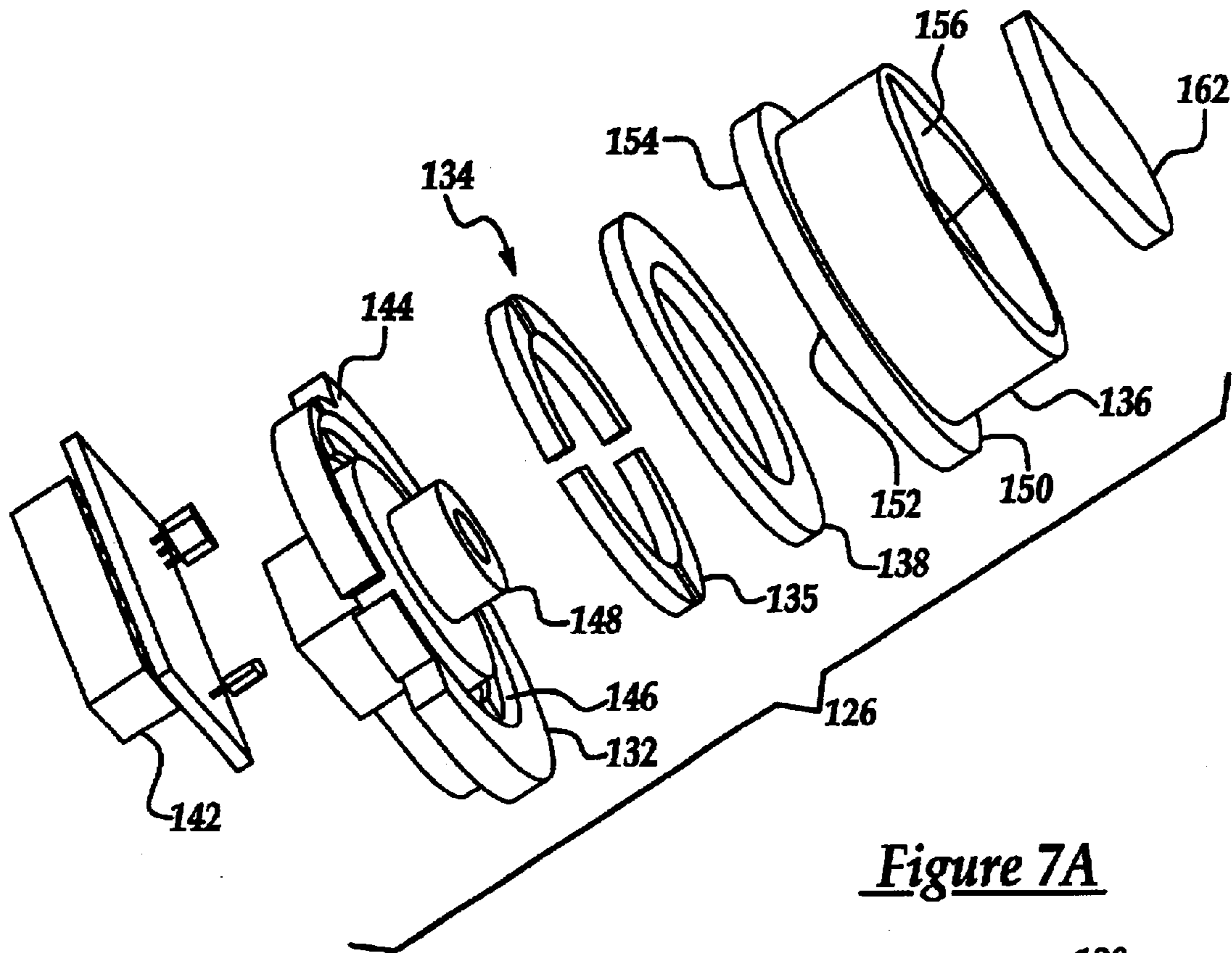


Figure 7A

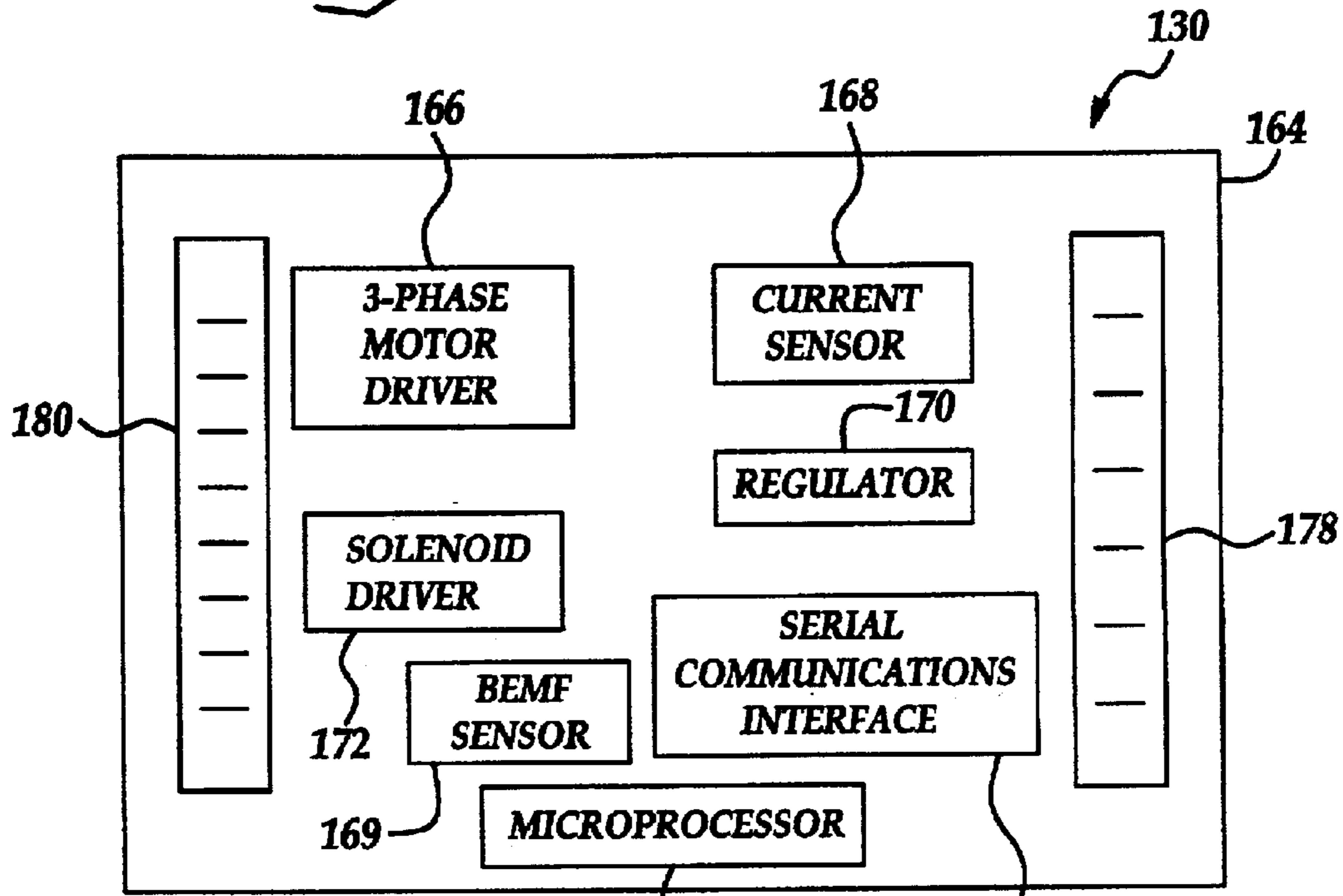


Figure 8

DIRECT DRIVE WINDSHIELD WIPER ASSEMBLY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to windshield wiper systems and, more particularly, to a windshield wiper system that utilizes individual direct drive motors for coordinated, but mechanically independent, control of the windshield wipers.

2. Description of the Related Art

Windshield wiper systems commonly employed in the related art include pivotally mounted wiper blades that are oscillated across a windshield between an in-wipe position, typically located near the cowl of an automotive vehicle, and an out-wipe position, usually associated with an A-pillar on the vehicle, in the case of the driver side wiper blade in this representative example. It is typically desirable to maximize the angular velocity of the blade assemblies between the in-wipe and out-wipe positions where the blade assembly is moving across the windshield in front of the driver to reduce the duration of each wipe cycle. On the other hand, it is also desirable to limit noise and inertia loading by reducing the velocity of the blade assemblies as they approach the wipe limits. These are two competing objectives that must be balanced in order to be successfully and economically obtained.

One long-standing design approach that has been employed in the related art includes the use of a single motor assembly, driven in one rotational direction, driving two separate wiper arms across the windshield of a vehicle. This approach requires a fairly complex linkage system to convert the singular angular motion of the wiper motor into the two-way linear reciprocal motion to drive both wiper arms. In the dashboard-firewall area, where these systems are typically installed, this mechanical linkage required a large amount of underhood space. Moreover, the area near this moving linkage must be kept clear of wires and other vehicle components. Additionally, the moving linkage, with its several pivot and rotational points is subject to mechanical inaccuracies and wear, readily introducing excessive wiper movement.

Nevertheless, for many years, designers and manufacturers were reluctant to depart from this established approach. However, improved vehicle aerodynamics that have fostered vehicle designs having longer sloped front surfaces are leading to windshield designs with more pronounced rake angles that result in larger window surfaces. A wiper system for such windshields must therefore include longer, more massive wiper arms and blades to wipe the required percentage of the larger surface. This has created a number of problems. Most notably, the larger arms and swept surface area increases the size of conventional wiper systems to such an extent that it becomes difficult to fit a single motor system within the typically allotted underhood space. This problem is further aggravated by the same aerodynamic sloped front surfaces of the newer vehicle designs, which reduce the available underhood space. Additionally, the larger area to be swept by the wiper system requires more power and control over the wiper arm that can be provided by a linkage type system.

In response to the changes in vehicle front face design and the loss of available underhood space, the dual motor wiper system has evolved. Representative examples of such systems can be found in U.S. Pat. No. 4,585,980 to Gille et al.,

U.S. Pat. No. 4,665,488 to Graham et al., U.S. Pat. No. 4,900,995 to Wainwright, and U.S. Pat. No. 5,252,897 to Porter et al. These wiper systems are generally directly driven. Additionally, U.S. Pat. No. 5,355,061 to Forham employs a brushless dc motor to operate a direct drive windshield wiper system, as do others that follow. The more recent direct drive wiper blade systems employing dual motors have utilized some hardware and/or software controlled switching scheme to control each individual motor, in reference to the other, to provide blade control across the windshield and prevent blade-to-blade contact.

The conventional control approach relies upon intricate software control and position sensing along the wipe pattern. This undesirably requires separate motor control circuitry and a reliance on the movement of the wiper motors to provide positional feedback. Generally, motor position feedback has been used in brushless dc motors by sensing the changes in the commutation of the motor windings. This has sometimes been done using Hall Effect sensors, as disclosed, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 4,680,515 to Crook, U.S. Pat. No. 4,723,100 to Horikawa et al., and U.S. Pat. No. 4,897,583 to Rees. The Hall Effect sensors have also been used to count pulses of a pulse train generated by a rotating toothed wheel to produce position signals for operational control of the motor. While suitable for use in windshield wiper systems, the use of the above-noted brushless dc motor controllers in a windshield wiper system that uses separate position sensors for coordination of the wipers can result in an unnecessarily complicated design. Also, any loss of power to the system will disorient and confuse these sensors such that the wiper arm position becomes an unknown. Thus, windshield wiper systems that employ pulse train type sensors suffer from the disadvantage that they easily lose the accurate position of the windshield wiper blade during common operating conditions and therefore suffer a loss of control in these circumstances.

The build-up of snow and ice on the windshield complicates the control of blade movement and the ability to accurately determine wiper arm position and can impede the movement of the blades unevenly, causing one blade to move faster than the other. When encountering this problem, electronically controlled wiper systems presently known in the art can often become unsynchronized and may clash as they become unable to maintain their sense of wiper arm position. Thus, there is a need in the art for a direct drive motor for a windshield wiper system that has integrated control circuitry and achieves position sensing such that the wiper arms position is known regardless of rotation and such that the detected arm position is not lost during power loss or loss of motion.

Conventional dual direct drive wiper systems use high-speed dc motors. This is undesirable, as it requires large counter-rotational forces to stop and then reverse the wiper arm at the end of its sweep. Also, large current draws are necessary to produce the counter-rotational forces which causes repetitive surges in the supplied power and induces great amounts of electromagnetic interference to the immediately surrounding parts of the vehicle. With a high-speed dc motor, it is also problematic to vary the speed of the wiper arm as it sweeps across the windshield, if this is desired as part of a sweeping pattern or predetermined clearing scheme. These drawbacks stem from the conventional construction of direct drive wiper motors, which have either a one-to-one direct drive or an inefficient gearing assembly to differ the wiper arm speed from motor speed. Thus, there is also a need in the art for a direct drive motor for a windshield wiper system that is efficient and controllable at a lower drive speed and that is electro-magnetically clean.

One other drawback to conventional wiper motor systems has recently emerged. The conventional direct drive windshield wiper systems employ dc motors that are of the standard 12-volt operating standard. This is presently adequate, but current design trends are moving toward more efficient 42 volt based automotive electrical systems. The change over to a 42 volt automotive electrical systems will be highly problematic for the prior dual direct drive wiper systems and presents a considerable drawback as the prior systems are not compatible. Therefore, there is a need to not only provide a direct drive windshield wiper system that overcomes the above-mentioned drawbacks but that also has the ability to be employed in the newly emerging 42 volt automotive electrical system environment.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION AND ADVANTAGES

Each of the disadvantages that presently exist in the related art as discussed above is overcome in the direct drive windshield wiper assembly of the present invention. This direct drive windshield wiper assembly includes at least one brushless DC motor providing a drive torque through an output that is rotatable about the longitudinal axis of the motor and a windshield wiper that is driven by the motor about the longitudinal axis in a repeated wiping motion across the surface of a windshield. The motor includes a planetary gear set having an output shaft. The gear set is coaxially disposed relative to the rotational output and the longitudinal axis of the motor and operatively interconnects the drive torque and the windshield wiper. The gear set is further operable to reduce the speed of the rotational output of the motor to the windshield wiper through the output shaft of the gear set.

The direct drive windshield wiper assembly according to the present invention may also include a position sensor that is adapted to sense the speed and position of the motor output. The position sensor includes a flux ring holder that is fixedly mounted within the motor and is adapted to support at least one flux ring thereupon. A magnet holder is operatively connected to the output of the motor and is adapted for rotation therewith. The magnet holder supports at least one magnet in spaced parallel relationship with respect to the flux ring. In addition, the motor includes a position sensor circuit that produces signals corresponding to the rotational speed and position of the windshield wiper.

In another alternate embodiment, the direct drive windshield wiper assembly of the present invention includes at least one brushless DC motor that provides a drive torque through an output and a windshield wiper that is driven by the motor in a repeated wiping motion across the surface of the windshield. The motor includes a housing and a stator fixedly supported within the housing. A rotor is rotatably supported within the housing and is disposed about the stationary stator. The rotor is operatively connected to the output of the motor and controllable to rotate in either direction thereby providing bi-directional rotation to the windshield wiper. In addition, the direct drive windshield wiper assembly further includes a latching mechanism that acts to secure the rotor and thus the output of the motor in a non-rotational disposition when the motor is off.

In still another embodiment of the direct drive windshield wiper assembly of the present invention the motor may further include a programmable control circuit that acts to control the operation of the motor so as to affect the position and speed of the windshield wiper.

One advantage of the windshield wiper system of the present invention is that it utilizes individual direct drive

motors for coordinated, but mechanically independent control of the windshield wiper. The present invention acts to maximize the angular velocity of the blade assemblies between in-wipe and out-wipe positions thereby reducing the duration of each wipe cycle while limiting the noise and inertia loading by efficiently structuring a brushless DC motor and by controlling the velocity of the blade assemblies as they approach the wipe limits when the direction of the wiper assembly must be reversed.

Another advantage of the windshield wiper system of the present invention is that the sweep speed and velocity of the wiper assembly within the wipe cycle may be controlled to reduce the time the wiper assembly spends in the driver's view area of the windshield thereby reducing the visual obstruction of the wiper assembly.

Another advantage of the windshield wiper system of the present invention is that it eliminates the complex linkages employed in the related art to convert single angular motion of the wipe motor into two-way linear reciprocal motion used to drive one or more windshield wiper arms. Thus, the present invention requires a smaller operational envelope than devices employed in the related art.

Another advantage of the present invention is that it employs a position sensor that senses the rotational speed and position of the windshield wiper and will not lose its position parameter even in the event of a power loss. Thus, the windshield wiper system of the present invention will not become unsynchronized and therefore will not clash due to an inability to maintain the sense of wiper arm position.

Another advantage of the present invention is that it employs a latching mechanism that secures the motor and thus the output of the motor in a non-rotational disposition when the motor is off.

Another advantage of the present invention is that it includes an integrated control circuitry that achieves position sensing such that the wiper arm position is known regardless of rotation and such that the detected arm position is not lost during power loss or loss of motion.

Still another advantage of the windshield wiper system of the present invention is that it may be employed in either a standard 12 volt or the more efficient 42 volt-based automotive electrical system.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Other advantages of the invention will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is an assembled view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention of a direct drive windshield wiper assembly;

FIG. 2 is an exploded view of the assemblies of the preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view of the assemblies of the preferred embodiment of the present invention and their physical relationship to each other;

FIG. 4 is an exploded view of the motor housing assembly of the preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 5 is an exploded view of the rotor assembly of the preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 6 is an exploded view of the gear housing assembly of the preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 7 is an exploded view of the electronics housing of the preferred embodiment of the present invention;

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FIG. 7A is an exploded detail view of the position sensor assembly of the electronics housing in the preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a block diagram of the programmable control circuit of the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT(S)

Referring now to the figures where like numerals are used to designate like structure throughout the drawings, a direct drive windshield wiper assembly of the present invention is generally indicated at 10. As shown in FIG. 1, the direct drive windshield wiper assembly 10 includes at least one motor 12 that rotatably drives a windshield wiper 14 across the surface of a windshield 16. Generally speaking, the motor 12 provides a drive torque through an output that is rotatable about the longitudinal axis of the motor 12 so that the windshield wiper 14 is driven about the same longitudinal axis in a repeated wiping motion across the surface of the windshield 16. The motor 12 further controllable to rotate in either direction, thereby providing bi-directional rotation to the windshield wiper 14. In addition, from the description that follows, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the windshield wiper assembly of the present invention may encompass two or more motors 12, each that drive a windshield wiper 14 in repeated wiping motion across the surface of a windshield 16. It should also be appreciated that the motor 12 may be of a brushless DC, a switched reluctance, or an induction type motor without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. However, for purposes of description and not by way of limitation, it will be described generally as a brushless DC motor in this specification. In the preferred embodiment, each motor 12 is electronically interconnected and controlled in a manner that will be described in greater detail below.

Specifically, as best shown in FIG. 2, the motor 12 includes a motor assembly, generally indicated at 20, a gear set assembly, generally indicated at 22, operatively supported on one end of the motor assembly 20 and an electronics assembly, generally indicated at 24, operatively supported on the motor assembly 20 opposite the gear set assembly 22. In the preferred embodiment, the gear set assembly 22, and the electronics assembly 24 are made of a plastic material composition formed by an injection molding process for ease of construction, weight, strength, and environmental considerations. The motor assembly 20 is made of a magnesium alloy to remove heat and dampen electromagnetic interference and may be formed by an injection molding process. It should be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that any of a variety of materials may be successfully employed in the manufacture of these parts.

As shown in FIGS. 3 and 4, the motor assembly 20 includes a housing 21 that is formed in a general cup shape and encloses a stator 26 that is fixedly supported within an inner cavity 28 of the motor housing 21, and a rotor assembly 30 that is rotatably supported within the motor housing 21 and disposed about the stationary stator 26. The stator 26 is formed in the shape of an annular ring having an open center and is disposed over a hollow cylindrical center hub 32 within the motor housing 20. The stator 26 is constructed in a known manner having either a plurality of stamped lamination pieces 34 stacked together or being of a one-piece molded powder metal. The stator 26 is conventionally wire wound and has an end plate 36 that is adapted to readily retain the ends of the wire windings while offering

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a plurality of connector points 38 for connection to the electronics assembly 24. The connector points 38 of the stator end plate 36 are accessible through openings 40 in the base of the motor housing 21. The center hub 32 of the motor housing 21 also has a bearing recess 50 (FIG. 4) that receives and retains the rotor bearing 52 (FIG. 3). The rotor bearing 52 serves to rotatively support the rotor assembly 30 as described below.

As shown in FIGS. 3 and 5, the rotor assembly 30 includes a back iron 60, a motor magnet 62 that is operatively supported by the back iron 60 and a rotor cap 64. A sun gear 66 is operatively mounted to the rotor cap 64 as will be described in greater detail below. The back iron 60 is generally shaped as a sleeve having an inner circumference 68 upon which the motor magnet 62 is molded. Alternately, the motor magnet 62 may be glued and pressed into the back iron 60. Thus the back iron 60 provides rigid support for the motor magnet 62. In the preferred embodiment, a molded permanent magnet of a composition of Nb—Fe—B (Niobium, Iron, and Boron) is desirable for its strength and durability. The Nb—Fe—B compound is also easy to mass produce and produces tight, short magnetic flux lines, which generate a magnetic field that is stronger than other moldable magnetic compounds allowing the magnet to be smaller and lighter. However, it will be appreciated by those having ordinary skill in the art that any of a variety of magnetic compounds may be used or that non-molded magnets may also be employed without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

The disk-shaped rotor cap 64 is fixedly mounted to the upper edge 72 of the rotor back iron 60, so that the rotor assembly 30 forms a cup-shape that is received by the motor housing 21. The rotor cap 64 has a central opening 74 and a bearing surface 76. The bearing surface 76 is disposed on the inner side of the rotor cap 64 and is received by and engaged to the rotor bearing 52 that is disposed within the center hub 32 within the motor housing 21. The central opening 74 of the rotor cap 64 is splined at 78 and adapted to complementarily receive in splined engagement the gear teeth 80 of a sun gear 66. Alternately, the sun gear 66 may be operatively interconnected to the rotor cap 64 using any other suitable means commonly known in the art. The sun gear 66 also has a central opening 82 and may include a truncated conical head 84 at one end.

As shown in FIGS. 3 and 6, the gear assembly 22 includes a gear housing 23 that is formed in a general cup shape and includes a planetary gear set, generally indicated at 86. The gear set 86 is coaxially disposed relative to the rotational output of the rotor assembly 30 and is thus coaxial to the longitudinal axis of the motor 12 and operatively interconnects the motor drive torque and the windshield wiper 14. The gear set 86 is further operable to reduce the speed of the rotational output of the motor 12 to the windshield wiper 14 through the output shaft 88 of the gear set 86.

In the preferred embodiment illustrated in these figures, the gear set 86 includes an output shaft 88, a ring gear 90, a carrier 92, and a plurality of planet gears 94 operatively supported by the carrier 92. The planet gears 94 are supported within a two-piece carrier 92 in meshing relationship with the ring gear 90 of the planetary gear set 86 and the sun gear 66 of the rotor assembly 30. The ring gear 90 is fixedly disposed within the inner circumference 96 of the gear housing 22. The output shaft 88 has a wiper end 98 and a sensor end 100. The sensor end 100 defines a predetermined diameter that can be narrower than the wiper end 98.

The wiper end 98 of the output shaft 88 extends outward through a central opening 102 of the gear housing 23. The

exposed portion **104** of the wiper end **98** is machined in a manner to receive and retain the end of a windshield wiper **14**. It should be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that the exposed portion of the wiper end **98** of the output shaft **88** may be splined or otherwise keyed to rotationally secure the wiper **14**. However, as will be discussed in greater detail below, there is no necessity for orienting the wiper **14** to a particular angular position of the output shaft **88** as the “park”, and lower and upper sweep limits of the wiper **14** are programmable and software calibrated on the vehicle once the direct drive windshield wiper assembly **10** is installed.

As best shown in FIG. **3**, the output shaft **88** also has a carrier interface portion **106** adjacent to the exposed portion **104**. The carrier interface portion **106** is received by, and operatively connected to, a hollow center sleeve **108** of the carrier **92**. It should be appreciated that the carrier **92** may be connected to the output shaft **88** by splines, a keyway, or any of a variety of connection methods. Thus, the central opening **102** of the gear housing **23** has an inner diameter sufficient to receive the combined carrier center sleeve **108** and the output shaft **88**. As can be seen in FIGS. **3** and **6**, a spring **110** and a spring washer **112** are of an inside and outside diameter that allows them to be received by the gear housing central opening **102** while being disposed over the output shaft wiper end **98** above the carrier center sleeve **108**. A push nut **114** and push nut washer **116** are disposed over the wiper end **98** of the output shaft **88**, such that the push nut washer **116** rotatively rides on the outer end surface **118** of the gear housing central opening **102** while causing a compressive biasing force to be placed on the spring **110** and spring washer **112** within the gear housing central opening **102** against the end of the carrier center sleeve **108**. The push nut **114** serves to lockingly engage the output shaft **88** and hold the push nut washer **116**, the spring **110**, and the spring washer **112** in place without the need of threads. The compressive, or biasing force, imparted by the spring **110** serves to maintain the longitudinal alignment of the components of planetary gear set **86** with the rotor assembly **30** and the stator **26**, as the carrier **92** is supportively biased against the truncated conical lip **84** of the sun gear **66**. Also, the biasing force of the spring **110** bears against the lip **84** so that the planet gears **94** maintain their alignment against the sun gear **66**, as seen in FIG. **3**.

The sun gear **66** is operatively driven by the rotational output of the brushless DC motor **12** by its direct connection to the rotor cap **64** of the rotor assembly **30**. The carrier **92** is operatively connected to the output shaft **88**, the ring gear **90** is fixedly mounted to the gear set housing **23** in a fixed position. Thus, in operation, rotation of the sun gear **66** causes the planet gears **94** to revolve around the ring gear **66** thereby rotating the carrier **92** and the output shaft **88** of said gear set about the longitudinal axis of the motor. The rotor assembly **30**, gear set **86**, and output shaft **88** within the motor **12**, are all in coaxial relationship to each other.

The motor housing **21** further includes a recess **42** that is designed to accommodate a portion of a latching mechanism, generally indicated at **44**. The back iron **60** of the rotor assembly **30** includes a plurality of notches **70** disposed about its lower edge. The latching mechanism **44** acts to secure the rotor assembly **30** and thus the output shaft **88** of the gear set **86** in non-rotational disposition when the motor **12** is off. More specifically, the latching mechanism **44** includes an electromagnetic actuator **45** and a latching member **46**. In the preferred embodiment, the electromagnetic actuator is a solenoid **45** that operatively drives the latching member **46** to a retracted position. In addition, the latching mechanism **44** includes a biasing member **48** that

produces a biasing force in a direction opposite of that produced by the solenoid **45** such that the latching member **46** engages at least one of the notches **70** formed on the back iron **60** of the rotor assembly **30** thereby immobilizing it. On the other hand, the electromagnetic force generated by the solenoid **45** is sufficient to overcome the biasing force to allow rotation of the rotor which allows the latching member **46** of the latching solenoid **44** to disengage from the notch **70** and thereby releasing the back iron **60** allowing it to rotate. In the preferred embodiment, the biasing member **48** is a coiled spring that normally biases the latching member **46** to the engaged position securing the rotor assembly **30** and thus, the output shaft **88** in non-rotational disposition when the motor **12** is off.

The gear housing **23** further includes a plurality of recessed bores **120** formed in the outer surface that receive and retain a like number of threaded inserts **122**. The treaded inserts **122** provide mounting points for the direct drive windshield wiper assembly **10** to locate and secure the assembly within the vehicle. Alternately, the direct drive windshield wiper assembly **10** may be mounted using a flange mount disposed upon the gear housing **23** or any other suitable mounting method commonly known in the art. A rubber boot **124** is sealingly disposed over the output shaft wiper end **98** and the gear housing central opening **102** in a manner that prevents environmental elements from entering the motor assembly **12** but allows the output shaft **88** to freely rotate as necessary.

As best seen in FIG. **3**, the output shaft **88** is received through a central opening in the sun gear **66** and through the center opening of the bearing assembly **52**, and extends inward into the hollow center hub **32** of the motor housing **21**. The output shaft **88** is not physically connected to either the sun gear **66** or the rotor bearing **52** but is free to rotate within them. In this manner, the sensor end **100** of the output shaft **88** is operatively connected to a position sensor as discussed below.

As illustrated in FIG. **7**, the electronics assembly **24** of the motor **12** includes a position sensor assembly **126**, an end cap **128**, and a programmable control circuit **130**. As shown in detail in FIG. **7A**, the position sensor assembly **126** is disposed upon the end cap **128** and is adapted to sense the speed and position of the output shaft **88**. The position sensor assembly **126** includes a flux ring holder, generally indicated at **132**, that fixedly supports at least one flux ring **134**, and a magnet holder, generally indicated at **136**, that fixedly supports at least one magnet **138** in spaced parallel relationship with respect to the flux ring **134**. The position sensor assembly **126** also includes an output shaft coupler, generally indicated at **140**, and a position sensor circuit, generally indicated at **142** for a purpose that will be explained in greater detail below.

The flux ring holder **132** is generally disk shaped having an end face **144**. The flux ring holder **132** is fixedly mounted to the end cap **128** and has an annular shaped slot **146** in its end face **144** to receive and retain the at least one flux ring **134**. The flux ring **134** is formed from a magnetically permeable material that is electrically capable of detecting variations in magnetic flux lines as they pass over and through the ring. The flux ring holder end face **144** also has an extended cylindrical protrusion **148** that extends toward the magnet holder **136**.

The magnet holder **136** is generally cylinder shaped having an end face **150** that is in parallel abutment to the flux ring holder end face **144**. The magnet holder end face **150** has a receiving bore **152** that receives the cylindrical pro-

trusion **148** of the flux ring holder **132**, which serves as a rotational axis for the magnet holder **136**. The magnet holder **136** further includes an annular shaped slot **154** in its end face **150** that is adapted to receive and retain an at least one magnet **138**. On the end opposite to the end face **150**, the magnet holder **136** has a recessed cavity **156** that receives and retains the output shaft coupler **140**. The output shaft coupler **140** serves as the physical connection between the position sensor assembly **126** and the output shaft sensor end **100** having a magnet holder portion **158** and an output shaft receiving end **160**.

The magnet holder portion **158** of the output shaft coupler **140** is formed in a shape complementary to be received and retained by the recessed cavity **156** of the magnet holder **136** and the output shaft receiving end **160** is formed in a shape to receive and retained the sensor end **100** of the output shaft **88**. A foam insert **162** is disposed within the recessed cavity **156** for shock absorption. It should be appreciated by those having ordinary skill in the art that the shaped portions of the recessed cavity **156** and the output shaft coupler **140** may be formed in any suitable geometric shape, as it is not necessary to have a zero degree orientation based on a physical reference point for the output shaft **88**. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the “park”, and the inner and outer sweep limits to the wiper, and hence the output shaft **88** of the direct drive windshield wiper system **10**, are programmed into the present invention after it is installed on the vehicle.

The position sensor circuit **142** is supported upon the flux ring holder **132** and is in electrical communication with, and receives electromagnetic signals from, the flux ring **134**. More specifically, the position sensor circuit **142** measures the flux variations generated within the flux ring **134**. The position sensor circuit **142** is also in electrical communication with the programmable control circuit **130**. The flux variations from the flux ring **134** are sensed as two quadrature electrical signals as the magnet **138**, held within the magnet holder **136**, is rotated about the stationary flux ring **134** by the rotating output shaft **88**. In the preferred embodiment, a plurality of flux sectors **135** form the flux ring **134** and are offset eccentrically from a single magnet **138**. The flux ring **134** is positioned such that the magnetic field induced within the flux ring **134** varies uniquely for all angular displacements in the rotation of the output shaft **88**. In this manner, the position sensor circuit **142** produces an instantaneous signal that is representative of a particular angular displacement of the output shaft **88** thereby allowing the position sensor **126** to act as an absolute position sensor for detecting the angular position of the output shaft **88**. Additionally, as the output shaft **88** moves, the position sensor circuit **142** continuously produces position signals. Dynamically, this series of signals allows the direction and speed of the output shaft **88** to be determined. In the preferred embodiment, the magnet **138** is bipolar, however it should be appreciated that the magnet **138** may also have multiple poles about its circumference.

In another non-limiting embodiment, at least one magnet **138** of an annular ring shape is offset eccentrically from a singular flux ring **134**. In either case, since the position of the magnet **138** varies the flux, so no power is required by the position sensor assembly **126** to follow the position of the output shaft. Thus, if the power to the windshield wiper assembly **10** fails or the power to the vehicle is removed, the windshield wiper assembly **10** does not lose its orientation and can instantly recover its positional information after power restoration. Therefore, the position sensor circuit **142** interprets the magnetic flux signals and produces an output

denoting the absolute position of the output shaft **88** and routes that signal to the programmable control circuit **130**.

Alternately, the position sensor assembly **126** may be replaced by a park sensing assembly. The park sensing assembly includes a magnetic “park platform” disposed on the output shaft and a “park” hall sensor mounted within the motor to detect the park platform. When the wiper assembly **10** is mounted to a vehicle, the wiper assembly **10** is oriented so that during the first half of the wipe area, the park platform is positioned such that it covers the park sensor. If the wiper assembly **10** is operating and the power is lost and then recovered, the park hall sensor will be in a relative position to either sense the park platform or not. If the park sensor senses the park platform, then the output shaft is in the first half of the wipe area and it is safe for the microprocessor to perform an out-wipe. If the park hall sensor does not sense the platform then the output shaft must be on the second half of the wipe area and it is safe for the microprocessor to perform an in-wipe. In either case, the park sensor will detect the platform edge, which is used as the position reference along the wipe path. This platform crossing provides opportunity for the microprocessor to obtain correct position. It should be noted that this embodiment must be used with additional physical sensors positioned about the motor windings that would provide a “pulse train” of position signals for an accurate determination of wiper arm position. This pulse train would be available with the “sensored” commutation scheme discussed below.

The programmable control circuit **130**, generally indicated in FIG. 7 is shown in block diagram form in FIG. 8. The control circuit **130** is a group of circuits mounted on a printed circuit board **164** that is disposed within the electronics housing **24** that provides electric and electronic circuits to control the operation of the motor **12** so as to effect the position and speed of the windshield wiper **14**. The programmable control circuit **130** includes a 3 (three) phase motor driver circuit **166**, a current sensor **168**, a back-electromotive force (BEMF) sensor **169**, a voltage regulator **170**, a solenoid driver **172**, a microprocessor **174**, and at least one serial communications interface **176**. The circuit board **164** also includes a 6-pin connector **178** and an 8-pin connector **180** to allow electrical communication with the other components of the system.

The 3-phase motor driver circuit **166** provides electromotive force to drive the motor. The 3-phase motor driver circuit **166** is a bridge circuit that utilizes 6 (six) N-Channel power MOSFET semiconductor devices in three half-bridges between the input voltage and the return, or ground. The microprocessor **174** provides pulse width modulated (PWM) triggering, or biasing, signals to the 3-phase bridge driver circuit **166**. These signals drive the MOSFETs and produce three separate voltages to apply to the stator windings. The 3 half-bridges produce the three output voltages in three separate phases that are provided in a ramping sequence to the windings of the stator **26** so that successive magnetic fields are generated and varied within the windings of the stator **26**. The generation of successive magnetic fields within the stator windings acts to angularly repel the magnetic fields of the rotor assembly **30**, thereby driving the rotor **30**, the planetary gear set **22**, and ultimately, the output shaft **88**. The modulation of the PWM signals is performed in a known manner to control the duty cycle of the signals to the MOSFETs. This controls the duration of the phases of the 3-phase voltage output, thereby controlling the rotational speed of the rotor **30**.

In producing the varying magnetic fields within the stator windings thereby creating rotor rotation, the ramping volt-

age waveform may be either sinusoidal or trapezoidal. Thus, the production of the three phase voltages from the 3-phase motor driver circuit **166** can be referred to as either sinusoidal or trapezoidal commutation. To properly control and time the commutation to drive the rotor **30** in the desired manner, the rotor position must be accurately determined, or sensed, as it rotates. This position sensing of the rotor **30** is used as feedback to the microprocessor **174**. In the preferred embodiment, the rotor position is derived in a “sensorless” manner, meaning that the rotor position is derived electronically and indirectly to provide the necessary feedback to the microprocessor **174** with no additional physical sensors used about the motor. In sensorless commutation configurations, either a back-electromotive force (BEMF) sensor **169** (comprised of a resistive voltage divider and a low pass filter) or the current sensor **168** is used to detect the commutation depending on the type of ramping waveform.

The preferred method of commutation (and rotor position detection) uses a trapezoidal waveform. As such, the preferred embodiment of the present invention uses a sensorless trapezoidal commutation scheme, which has a BEMF sensor **169** to detect the commutation electrically and indirectly from the stator windings to provide feedback to the microprocessor **174**. More specifically, although called a sensor, by detecting a signal electronically and indirectly, the BEMF sensor **169** of the present invention is not a sensor in the common use of the word. The BEMF sensor **169** actually detects an induced magnetic flux signal within a portion of the stator windings and the microprocessor **174** uses this flux signal feedback to calculate the rotor position using an “extended Kalman estimator” algorithm. The microprocessor **174** then uses the calculated rotor position to generate the necessary PWM signals (to feed to the 3-phase bridge driver circuit **166**) to properly time the trapezoidal commutation. In this commutation scheme, the current sensor **168** is only used to provide signals for motor current regulation and calculation of the output torque of the motor. It is not involved in the commutation.

In an additional non-limiting embodiment, sensorless sinusoidal commutation may be employed. In this case, the current sensor **168** is electrically connected to the ground side of the three half bridges (6 MOSFETs) or in such a manner as to detect the current of two of the three phases. Again, this is a sensorless (indirect) manner of determining rotor position, as the sensed current signals are fed back to the microprocessor **174** to calculate the rotor position using the “extended Kalman estimator” algorithm. The microprocessor **174** then uses the calculated rotor position to generate and provide the necessary PWM signals to control and time the sinusoidal commutation.

In other non-limiting embodiments, additional sensors may be physically located about the motor to provide a “sensored” commutation. For example, three Hall sensor devices may be physically disposed within the spacing of the stator windings, **120** electrical degrees apart, to provide feedback signals to the microprocessor **174** as a directly sensed feedback to control and time a trapezoidal based commutation.

The solenoid driver **172** is in electrical communication with the latching solenoid **44** disposed within the motor housing **20** and is operable to control the latching solenoid **44**. When the solenoid driver **172** actuates the latching solenoid **44** it overcomes the biasing force of the biasing member **48** and withdraws the latching arm **46** from the rotor **30** allowing the rotor assembly **30** to rotate. In one preferred embodiment, the solenoid driver **172** may be of an “H” bridge type.

It should be appreciated that the microprocessor **174**, as a device, is generally described and may be a complex microprocessor or any of another lesser type of integrated circuit such as a digital signal processor. As such, the microprocessor **174** includes a memory that is programmable to retain at least one predetermined windshield wiper control scheme. It should be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that the microprocessor **174** has a memory capable of retaining a stored data program having instructions for the control of the wiper motor assembly **12**. Thus, the microprocessor **174** may employ a ROM (read-only-memory) that permanently stores an operational program, or a “flash” type memory that may be changed or updated, as well as a volatile RAM (random access memory). In the preferred embodiment, the microprocessor **174** has a semi-permanent flash memory, which is loaded by an external computer or a programming device. The flash memory retains its stored program data even after power is removed from the device, but may be updated or refreshed as necessary at any time during the service life of the wiper motor. The RAM of the microprocessor **174** is used to temporarily store data during the execution of the stored program while operating the wiper motor **12**. The microprocessor **174** further includes an A/D (analog/digital) converter, a digital interface, and time capture circuitry. The A/D converter allows the digitally based microprocessor device to interact with the various circuits and devices that are analog based. The digital interface allows communication to digitally based components and circuits, and the time capture circuitry allows for timing and control of the various signals and operations under the control of the microprocessor **174**.

The serial interface circuit **176** has a Local Interconnected Network (LIN) physical layer. The LIN layer allows interconnection between the two wiper motor assemblies **12** of a windshield wiper system through the use of a single wire connection. In this manner, the individual windshield wiper motor assemblies can communicate and the pre-determined programs stored in the flash memories can coordinate the wiper movements across the windshield. In the preferred embodiment, the serial interface circuit **176** uses two LIN layer circuits. The first LIN is for the interconnection with the vehicle. The second LIN is for communication with the second wiper motor. It should be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that the serial interface and the LIN physical layers may be incorporated within the microprocessor **174** and that other known types of intercommunication networks, such as a control area network (CAN) for example, may also be employed with the direct drive windshield wiper assembly **10**.

The preferred embodiment of the present invention is adapted to operate within a 12 volt DC environment, as is standard within the American automotive industry. However, in another non-limiting embodiment, the present invention is adapted to be operable in a 42 volt or comparable vehicle operating environment, which are currently being developed for, and/or are evolving in, foreign and domestic automotive markets.

The end cap **128** physically supports the printed circuit board **164**, the latching mechanism **44**, and the position sensor assembly **126**. The end cap **128** is generally cup shaped having an open central cavity **182**. As seen in FIG. **3**, the printed circuit board **164** is disposed in bottom of the end cap **128**, thereby closing off and sealing the open central cavity **182** from the ambient environment and protecting the enclosed electronic components. The end cap **128** has extension connectors **184**, position sensor connectors **186** (FIG. **7**), an external electrical connector **188** and latching solenoid

housing 190. The extension connectors 184 extend upward through the base of the motor housing 21 and have stator electrical contacts 192, which clip into and electrically connect with the connector points 38 of the stator end plate 36. The stator electrical contacts 192 also have circuit board ends 194, which are disposed in a manner within the end cap 128 that allows them to engage and interconnect with certain contacts within the 8-pin connector 180 of the printed circuit board 164. The position sensor connectors 186 extend upward in a manner to engage the electrical contacts of the position sensor circuit 142. Similar to the stator electrical contacts 192, the position sensor connectors 186 also have circuit board ends 196, which are disposed in a manner within the end cap 128 that allows them to engage and interconnect with certain contacts within the 6-pin connector 178 of the printed circuit board 164.

The external electrical connector 188 has a recess 198 and a locking tab 200, or the like, which provides an environmentally protected interconnection with a wiring harness connector of the vehicle (not shown) in a typical manner. The external electrical connector 188 also includes a series of electrical contacts 202 that provide power and ground sources to the printed circuit board 164, and the LIN physical connections for the serial interface circuits 176. The latching solenoid housing 190 is a recessed compartment molded into the end cap 128 to receive the body of the latching mechanism 44. Solenoid electrical connectors 204 extend from the latching mechanism 44 through the end cap 128 to the 6-pin connector 178 on the printed circuit board 164. A vent hole 206 is disposed in the end cap 128 at the bottom of the latching solenoid housing recess 190. It contains a membrane 208 that allows the passage of air but not moisture.

In operation, the direct drive windshield wiper assembly 10 is installed in a motor vehicle in a position relative to a windshield such that a wiper 14, when attached to the output shaft 88 of the wiper assembly 10, can sweep across a portion of the windshield. A flash programming device (not shown) is connected to the external electrical connector 188 of the wiper assembly 10. It should be appreciated by those having ordinary skill in the art that a flash programming device may be interconnect to more than one wiper assembly or through a vehicle serial data bus, or the like, depending on the wiring of the vehicle and if data bus interconnections are used between vehicle systems. The flash memory of the microprocessor 174 is then "flashed" or loaded with a predetermined wiper control program, which contains specific parameters, such as, the wipe area of the windshield, the predetermined in-wipe and out-wipe positions of the windshield wiper blade, and the desired wiper speed profiles, as well as dynamic control parameters of motor position, speed, torque and current. The wiper assembly is then calibrated as to the lower and upper sweep limits by placing the wiper in the appropriate physical position then programming that position in the memory. It should be appreciated that a "park" position is then either programmed into the assembly or is calculated by a programming algorithm, which will move the wiper assembly 10 to the desired position and then locks it with the latching mechanism 44 when required. In this way, no additional physical devices or apparatus are required to lock and hold the wiper in its predetermined "park" position. If more than one wiper assembly 10 is employed on the vehicle, the microprocessors 174 of each assembly may be coordinated in a predetermined windshield wiper control scheme, one to the other, using the serial interface circuitry, to provide the proper sweep profile and avoid a clash of wipers on the windshield.

During wiper operation, the wiper assembly 10 utilizes the upper and lower sweep limits and the program stored in the flash memory to control the sweep of the wiper 14 across the windshield 16. It should be appreciated that various control programs can be stored in the programmable control circuit 130, which consider and incorporate external environmental parameters that influence the wiper operation. For example, the speed of the vehicle, the amount and type of ambient precipitation, and the ambient and interior temperatures may be factored into the control of the sweep of the wiper. Additional weather considerations, such as ice on the windshield and/or a build-up of snow at the lower end of the sweep may be countered by a particular change to the sweep speed and torque of the wiper to clear such conditions, if the programming so dictates.

Thus, the windshield wiper system of the present invention utilizes individual direct drive brushless DC motors for coordinated, but mechanically independent control of the windshield wiper. The present invention acts to maximize the angular velocity of the blade assemblies between in-wipe and out-wipe positions thereby reducing the duration of each wipe cycle while limiting the noise and inertia loading by efficiently structuring the DC motor and by controlling the velocity of the blade assemblies as they approach the wipe limits. In addition, the windshield wiper system of the present invention eliminates the complex linkages employed in the related art to convert single angular motion of the wiper motor into two-way linear reciprocal motion used to drive a pair of windshield wiper arms. Thus, the present invention requires a smaller operational envelope than devices employed in the related art.

The present invention employs a position sensor that senses the rotational speed and position of the windshield wiper and will not lose these parameters even in the event of a power loss. Thus, the windshield wiper system of the present invention will not become unsynchronized and therefore will not clash due to an inability to maintain the sense of wiper arm position. The present invention also employs a latching mechanism that secures the motor and thus the output of the motor in a non-rotational disposition when the motor is off. Furthermore, the present invention includes an integrated control circuitry that achieves position sensing such that the wiper arm position is known regardless of rotation and such that the detected arm position is not lost during power loss or loss of motion.

Finally, the windshield wiper system of the present invention may be employed in either a standard 12 volt or the more efficient 42 volt-based automotive electrical system.

The invention has been described in an illustrative manner. It is to be understood that the terminology that has been used is intended to be in the nature of words of description rather than of limitation. Many modifications and variations of the invention are possible in light of the above teachings. Therefore, within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced other than as specifically described.

We claim:

1. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly comprising:
 - at least one brushless DC motor providing a drive torque through an output that is rotatable about the longitudinal axis of said motor and a windshield wiper that is driven by said motor about said longitudinal axis in a repeated wiping motion across the surface of a windshield;
 - said motor including a motor housing, a gear set housing operatively supported on one end of said motor housing

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and an electronics housing operatively supported on said motor housing opposite said gear set housing, said gear set housing encompassing a planetary gear set; said planetary said gear set being coaxially disposed relative to said rotational output and said longitudinal axis of said motor and operatively interconnecting said drive torque and said windshield wiper, said planetary gear set further operable to reduce the speed of the rotational output of said motor to said windshield wiper through said output shaft of said gear set;

a position sensor disposed within said electronics housing that is adapted to sense the speed and position of said output shaft of said gear set, said position sensor includes a flux ring holder that is adapted to support at least one flux ring thereupon, said position sensor further includes a magnet holder operatively connected to said output shaft of said gear set and adapted for rotation therewith, said magnet holder supporting at least one magnet in spaced parallel relationship with respect to said flux ring; and

a position sensor circuit adapted for producing signals as to the rotational speed and position of said output shaft of said planetary gear set.

2. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **1** wherein said motor housing, gear set housing, and electronics housing are formed by an injection molding process.

3. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **2** wherein said motor housing of said DC brushless motor includes a stator fixedly supported within said motor housing, a rotor rotatably supported within said motor housing and disposed about said stationary stator, said rotor operatively connected to said output shaft of said gear set and controllable to rotate in either direction thereby providing bi-directional rotation to said output shaft of said gear set.

4. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **3** wherein brushless DC motor includes a latching mechanism for securing said rotor and thus said output shaft of said gear set in non-rotational disposition when said motor is off.

5. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **4** wherein said rotor includes a plurality of notches, said latching mechanism including an electromagnetic actuator, a latching member, and a biasing member, said latching member subject to a biasing force to engage at least one of said notches formed on said rotor to immobilize same and subject to an electromagnetic force generated by said actuator to overcome said biasing force to allow rotation of said rotor.

6. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **5** wherein said plurality of notches are defined on at least one end of said rotor and spaced from said latching mechanism when said electromagnetic device is actuated.

7. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **3** wherein said stator is of a stamped lamination construction being conventionally wound, and having an end plate that is adapted to retain the ends of the windings while offering a plurality of quick mounting points for connection to said electronics housing.

8. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **1** wherein said coaxial planetary gear set is disposed within said gear set housing and includes a sun gear, a ring gear, a carrier, and a plurality of planet gears operatively supported by said carrier, said planet gears disposed in meshing relationship with said sun gear and said ring gear and operable to reduce the speed of the rotational output of said brushless DC motor.

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9. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **8** wherein said sun gear is operatively driven by the rotational output of said DC motor, said carrier is operatively connected to said output shaft of said gear set and said ring gear is fixedly mounted to said gear set housing in a fixed position relative to said planet gears such that rotation of said sun gear causes said planet gears to revolve around said ring gear thereby rotating said carrier and said output shaft of said gear set about said longitudinal axis of said motor.

10. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly comprising: at least one motor providing a drive torque through an output and a windshield wiper that is driven by said motor in a repeated wiping motion across the surface of a windshield;

said motor further including a position sensor that is adapted to sense the speed and position of said output, said position sensor including a flux ring holder fixedly mounted within said motor and adapted to support at least one flux ring thereupon, a magnet holder operatively connected to said output of said motor and adapted for rotation therewith, said magnet holder supporting at least one magnet in spaced parallel relationship with respect to said flux ring, and a position sensor circuit adapted for producing signals in response to said position sensor as to the rotational speed and position of said windshield wiper.

11. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **10** wherein said motor includes a gear set having an output shaft that interconnects said drive torque to said windshield wiper and is adapted to reduce the speed of the rotational output of said motor to said windshield wiper through said output shaft of said gear set.

12. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **11** wherein said at least one magnet is disposed within said magnet holder in a manner having a predetermined angular orientation with respect to said at least one parallel spaced flux ring, such that the magnetic field emanating from said at least one magnet presents a specific magnetic flux signal to said at least one flux ring that is representative of a particular angular displacement of said output shaft thereby allowing said position sensor to act as an absolute position sensor for detecting the angular position of said output shaft.

13. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim **10** wherein said motor is at least one of a type of motor from a group comprising a brushless DC motor, a switched reluctance motor, or an induction motor.

14. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly comprising: at least one brushless DC motor providing a drive torque through an output and a windshield wiper that is driven by said motor in a repeated wiping motion across the surface of a windshield;

said motor further including a housing and a stator fixedly supported within said housing, a rotor rotatably supported within said housing and disposed about said stationary stator, said rotor includes a plurality of notches and is operatively connected to said output of said motor and controllable to rotate in either direction thereby providing bi-directional rotation to said windshield wiper; and

a latching mechanism adapted for securing said rotor and thus said output of said motor in non-rotational disposition when said motor is off, said latching mechanism including an electromagnetic actuator and a latching member and a biasing member, said latching member subject to said biasing member to engage at least one of

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said notches formed on said rotor to immobilize same and subject to an electromagnetic force to activate said actuator thereby disengaging said rotor.

15. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim 14 wherein said plurality of notches are defined on at least one end of said rotor and spaced from said latching mechanism when said electromagnetic device is not actuated.

16. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly comprising: at least one brushless DC motor providing a drive torque through an output that is rotatable about the longitudinal axis of said motor and a windshield wiper that is driven by said motor in a repeated wiping motion across the surface of a windshield;

said motor including a gear set having an output shaft, said gear set being coaxially disposed relative to said rotational output and longitudinal axis of said motor and operatively interconnecting said drive torque and said windshield wiper, said gear set further operable to reduce the speed of the rotational output of said motor to said windshield wiper through said output shaft of said gear set; and

said motor further including a programmable control circuit that is operatively supported within an electronic housing and includes a motor driver, a current sensor, a voltage regulator, a solenoid driver, a microprocessor and at least one serial communications interface, said interface having a Local Interconnected Network (LIN)

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physical layer, said programmable control circuit acting to control the operation of said brushless DC motor so as to effect the position and speed of said windshield wiper.

17. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim 16 wherein said microprocessor includes a memory that is programmable to retain at least one predetermined windshield wiper control scheme.

18. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim 17 wherein said serial communications interface is in electrical communication with the serial communications interface of at least one other direct drive windshield wiper assembly such that said microprocessor of said windshield wiper assembly interfaces with the microprocessor of said at least one other windshield wiper assembly thereby allowing said microprocessors to coordinate said at least one predetermined windshield wiper control scheme.

19. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim 16 wherein said solenoid driver is in electrical communication with a latching solenoid disposed within said motor, said solenoid driver operable to control said latching solenoid such that said motor is free to rotate when said solenoid driver causes said latching solenoid to activate.

20. A direct drive windshield wiper assembly as set forth in claim 16 wherein said programmable control circuit and said brushless DC motor are adapted to be operable in a 42 volt operating environment.

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